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What can the capabilities approach learn from an ubuntu ethic?

A relational approach to development theory

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1. Introduction

According to the capabilities approach, human flourishing as it relates to justice is an individual's possession of the capabilities to achieve functionings that we have reason to value. In contrast, by one salient African approach, human flourishing consists of having the propensity to pursue communal relations with other individuals, or relations of fellowship, such that relationships, or people's capacities for them, have fundamental value. This is often called an *ubuntu* ethic, after the southern African isiNguni word for humanness. At first blush, there appears to be a tension between these two theoretical perspectives. While the former seems to focus on individuals as the locus of ethical value, the latter concentrates on the relations between individuals as the locus.

This tension can be sharpened if we consider their different conceptualisations of freedom. For a capabilities theorist like Amartya Sen (1999), an individual's freedom consists in her capabilities to achieve valuable functionings, regardless of the conditions of others; this suggests that an individual's freedom is essentially a form of *independence* from others. Yet, as we explain below, an *ubuntu* ethic conceives of freedom, i.e., governance by one's higher self, at least partially in terms of an individual's ability to care for others, suggesting that an individual's freedom is inherently a form of *interdependence* with others.

Are these two approaches incompatible, or might the most attractive facets of each in fact

admit of unification? In this article we aim to show that the latter is the case. A number of capabilities theorists have emphasised that the reasoned identification of what is valuable has relational features inasmuch as it requires public deliberation, that the possession of some capabilities instrumentally relies on other people, and that a small number of capabilities are intrinsically relational and valuable for their own sake. These arguments have been made in a piecemeal fashion over time by different theorists; in contrast, we maintain that an *ubuntu* ethic provides a promising unified theoretical grounding for deeming capabilities in general to be inherently relational (at least in part).

An *ubuntu* ethic plausibly suggests that relations play a much stronger role in the capabilities approach than often assumed. We argue for the novel claim that relationality is part of the concept of a capability itself, where such relationality has intrinsic ethical value. Where the standard capabilities approach conceives of poverty as an individual's inability to achieve goals that we have reason to value, we contend that an *ubuntu* approach conceptualises poverty as essentially (even if not exhaustively) a disruption of relationship in three respects. First, it undermines an individual's ability to care for others; second, it as an expression of the lack of care on the part of social actors, such as the state; third, if an individual attains a capability by actively depriving others or passively benefiting from their deprivation, then she cannot be said to have fully attained the relevant capability since it is achieved by having failed to commune with others.

Capabilities, as we conceive of them, are essentially (in part) abilities to relate to other persons in ways that roughly express friendliness with them. By extension, we argue that freedom is not independence from others but rather a certain form of interdependence. This understanding of the ethical centrality of relations grounds new normative perspectives on

capabilities, and offers a more comprehensive grasp of the relevance of relationships to empirical enquiry.

In aiming to show what the capabilities approach can learn from *ubuntu*, we take both more or less for granted. Although we indicate what we find promising from both traditions, we do not take the time to respond to critiques of either, merely alluding to *prima facie* problems.

Instead we hope that this article provides an indication of the rich conversations that are possible when African and Anglo-American intellectual traditions engage one another, and whets the appetite of thinkers working in western traditions to engage with their colleagues in Africa and the global South more generally.

We begin by interpreting the capabilities approach largely as a response to particularism, since this clarifies its current salient other-regarding features and provides conceptual space to develop a new view of capabilities as inherently relational (Section 2). We then articulate what we find particularly appealing about the ethic of *ubuntu*, though do note some objections that need to be addressed elsewhere for a full defence (Section 3). Following this, we consider what an *ubuntu*-based capabilities approach might look like, arguing that a relational instance of the capabilities approach is both unique and compelling (Section 4). Along the way, we apply our theory to deprivations related to poverty in order to illustrate several of the features that make the theory a promising new alternative.

2. The role of others in the capabilities approach

2.1. Public deliberation and the role of others

We take Amartya Sen's influential articulation of the capabilities approach (1999) as the standard view for ease of discussion. This view can be understood partly as a response to particularism in

moral philosophy, the position that much of the most revealing ethical insight does not come from abstract principles. Framing it in this way helps us understand the distinctive role of public deliberation in the capabilities approach. The appeal to public deliberation means that other-regarding considerations are more central to the capabilities approach than might appear at first blush, although in Sen these are limited to the reasoned identification of valuable functionings. Our aim in this section is to clarify the respects in which the capabilities approach, as Sen and other capabilities theorists understand it, already acknowledges relational factors, such that *ubuntu* considerations would extend them theoretically. For alternative accounts that have a weaker role for public deliberation or suggest a fixed list of capabilities, our *ubuntu* critique would constitute more of a challenge than an extension.

There are several versions of particularism in moral philosophy. For this discussion, the salient version belongs to Bernard Williams, who rejects the codification of ethics into an overarching theory like deontology or utilitarianism and has inspired Sen and others who are cautious of over-extending the role of abstract moral principles in practical reason.¹ The grounds for this approach are twofold. Firstly, our moral lives are messy: they are characterised by a plurality of values and marked by the possibility of ethical dilemmas and irretrievable regret. The attempt to provide an overarching theory risks simplifying such messiness away. This arguably not only is a hopeless task, but also profoundly disregards the value of having a rich and complex moral life (Williams 1976). Secondly, pure theory cannot plausibly be used as a decision procedure for how to act. Williams argues that it is unintelligible to assume that something could be a genuine reason for us to act if it has no relation to anything we care about (Williams 1981).

¹ We draw on Williams' brand of particularism as Sen worked with Williams on an edited volume of essays on utilitarianism and co-wrote with Williams a critical introduction that made explicit recourse to Williams' particularist commitments (Sen and Williams 1982).

One implication of this claim is that a moral theory can have traction on our reasons for acting only if we come to care deeply about this moral theory, which is hardly the way that good moral agents seem to conduct themselves. This context-dependence sets strong limits on the reach of theory in our practical lives.

It is helpful to understand the capabilities approach as being informed by both claims. First, the approach is resolutely pluralistic and does not seek to simplify the complexity of our moral lives (Qizilbash 2007; Sen 1999, 77). In place of a single capability, Sen offers a plurality of capabilities that may be weighted in a variety of ways relative to functionings. Moreover, capabilities may have instrumental and non-instrumental values: while a capability gets its sense and worth primarily from the functioning that it enables, Sen argues that some capabilities can also be valued for themselves (Sen 1999, 17). In addition, although a functioning is defined as an activity that we have reason to value for its own sake, Sen argues that reasoned reflection on our values can take different forms. A certain group can be guided by background social and moral norms, but it can also try to imagine whether other people could share its values. “If rationality were a church”, he writes, “it would be a rather broad church” (Sen 2009, 195).

These reflections suggest that the capabilities approach is not primarily a moral theory; instead, it works as an epistemic tool for understanding how we come to conceive of wellbeing for purposes of morality or at least public policy, or what Anand and Sen (1994) call an *informational focus* on human development. Specifically, the approach makes a central claim: wellbeing is best understood by focusing on an individual's capabilities, where a capability represents the real opportunities that an individual has to achieve specific outcomes – beings and doings – that we have reason to value. This provides a distinctive conceptualisation of human development in terms of freedom, understood as the ability of people to lead the kinds of lives

they have reason to value. The process of development therefore consists primarily in expanding and enhancing individual capabilities, and this means giving them the freedom to accomplish more and better functionings.

The epistemic orientation of the capabilities approach comes to the fore in Sen's consistent emphasis on the limits of what pure theory can do. This is especially clear in the debate initiated by Martha Nussbaum about whether to construct a definitive list of capabilities. Nussbaum (2001) famously develops a central list of capabilities, on the grounds that such a list is necessary to sharpen the critical edge of the capabilities approach. She argues that Sen's perspective on freedom is too vague, because it does not identify those capabilities that limit other capabilities, and does not distinguish between significant and trivial capabilities or between good and bad capabilities (Nussbaum 2003). In response, Sen concedes that central capabilities must be selected, but argues against a single, definitive list that applies to all places and at all times. "Pure theory", Sen contends, "cannot 'freeze' a list of capabilities for all societies for all time to come, irrespective of what the citizens come to understand and value. That would not only be a denial of the reach of democracy, but also a misunderstanding of what pure theory can do" (Sen 2004, 78).

We understand Sen's claim as stemming from the particularist view that theory cannot provide a predefined, absolute set of procedures for identifying wellbeing; simply put, theory cannot do the thinking for us. Instead, it can guide and enrich our reflections on how to value wellbeing and deprivation in a particular time and place. Scholars sympathetic to this view have constructed methodologies for articulating and criticising lists of capabilities that can be used in specific contexts (Robeyns 2003; Alkire 2007).

This context-specificity accords a strong role to public deliberation. Anand and Sen

(1994) argue that understanding wellbeing requires us to take people's capacity for rational deliberation seriously and critically examine their reasons for acting. This is because we deliberate from a particular historical perspective, so that considering other perspectives can often be expected to improve the deliberations that shape institutional reform. Some reasons for acting are based on what Sen calls sympathy, where a person's feelings are affected by the wellbeing of others (Sen 1977, 326). In acting to improve their conditions, a person improves her own affective wellbeing. Other reasons for acting are based on commitment, where a person comes to have a preference on the basis of a reasoned analysis (Sen 1977, 327). Commitment has a cognitive element, which can be drawn out in several different ways, but a key feature is that it is based on reasons that others can share, and it is therefore open to public deliberation (Sen 2005).

While critics have argued that Sen's conception of public deliberation is under-specified and idealistic (Gasper and Van Staveren 2003), the appeal to public deliberation is nevertheless significant, as it introduces an other-regarding dimension to the analysis of individual wellbeing. Sen (2009, 192) stresses that actions based on commitment are not necessarily “a corollary of any general pursuit of well-being”, either with regards to oneself or others. Yet, since a commitment by definition is open to public deliberation, the reasons underlying it are implicitly communicable – such reasons are good reasons only if they have potential for others to reflect on them and adopt them. More deeply, the process of adopting an ethical perspective is fundamentally a process of being sensitive to the needs and responses of others, and the concept of a commitment therefore has a crucial, if basic, ethical slant. Thus, although other-regarding considerations are not necessarily an index of wellbeing, they are a part of coming to understand wellbeing and responding to deprivation.

On our interpretation, the relational character of reasoned commitments is therefore a significant, albeit implicit, component of the capabilities approach, for wellbeing is defined in terms of the capabilities to realise functionings we have reason to value, or be committed to. Considering the capabilities approach as a response to particularism explains its appeal to public deliberation and highlights one relational dimension of our reasoning about individual wellbeing and deprivation. Our view, however, is that relationality does not just express itself in our deliberations about which capabilities are valuable, but is also an important dimension of capabilities themselves.

2.2. The relational properties of capabilities – existing critiques

We now discuss the way in which the capabilities approach has been lately extended to include some of the relational properties of capabilities. By relational properties we mean that if a person *A* has a relational property, then she has this property in virtue of her possible or actual interaction with at least one other person, *B*. Accordingly, a relational property cannot be found within either *A* or *B* alone; conceptualising and evaluating this property makes necessary reference to both of them. This differs from a contrasting, intrinsic property, which need not make reference to both (deleted for blind review). The critiques we discuss make a case for including such shared properties in the analysis of some capabilities. In doing so they extend the relational dimension introduced by public deliberation, moving from the reasoned *identification* of what is valuable to the *possession* of what is valuable. We first discuss a growing body of literature emphasising the way in which we may have reason to value relations for their instrumental role in achieving many capabilities. We then discuss recent work that points to a small subset of capabilities related to social connectedness, which we have reason to value for

their own sake, a foreshadowing of our more thorough relational analysis of capabilities.

It is important to distinguish from the start these relational critiques from the familiar criticism that the capabilities approach is too *individualistic* in that it pays insufficient ethical attention to the social context in which individuals are embedded (Stewart and Deneulin 2002). From the preceding discussion, however, it should be clear that other-regarding features are a crucial normative component of applying the capabilities approach, since the identification of functionings relies on people sharing their reasons with one another. Hence, Qizilbash (2007) and Robeyns (2005) fairly conclude that this charge of ethical individualism is irrelevant. In contrast, a relational critique seeks to deepen the other-regarding features of the capabilities approach by building relational properties into the realization of a capability.

One version of the relational critique lies in Foster and Handy's articulation of *external capabilities*. On their account, a person gains an external capability through her relationship with at least one other person. Or, more formally, external capabilities “are freedoms to achieve functionings that a person values by accessing the capabilities of other people through relationships” (Foster and Handy 2008, 369). They give an example of a farmer who learns about crop prices from his friend, who has access to the Internet. This expansion of his capabilities, they argue, “depends crucially and contingently on his friendship with the first farmer, so the new capability is hardly an individual capability” (2008, 363). External capabilities are therefore distinguished from individual capabilities by the way in which they are shared between individuals in virtue of their interaction with one another. Since the relationship between the farmer and his friend enables the farmer's external capability, an analysis of his capability makes necessary reference to both the farmer and his friend, and the relationship between the two.

Pattanaik (2006) deepens this relational analysis in his exploration of what one can call

“expected” capabilities.² Consider a situation in which a Dalit, someone from a low caste in India, is legally allowed to access water from the village well. However, if she accesses her legal right, she may face substantial persecution from high-castes in the village. Pattanaik points out the extent to which she faces persecution might crucially depend on whether she is the only person to challenge tradition, or whether other Dalits join her in getting drinking water from the village well. In this case, the woman does not have a real capability to access clean drinking water, but she could come to have this capability in the future. Her possession of this capability is uncertain, because it depends not only on her actions, but also on the actions of others. Consequently, Pattanaik argues that “our freedom often comes not directly in the form of our freedom to choose a functioning bundle, but in the form of the freedom to choose alternative actions which, together with other people's actions, determine our achievements in terms of functioning” (Pattanaik 2006, 195). Pattanaik's argument draws our attention to the way in which the realization of many capabilities can have important relational properties under conditions of uncertainty.

Lack of attention to such relational properties may have important repercussions for individual wellbeing. Dercon (2002) provides a sustained and nuanced discussion of the way in which the provision of safety-nets, like social grants, can crowd out pre-existing informal collective insurance mechanisms. Collective insurance has relational properties, as an individual is insured against risk only in virtue of her relationship with other individuals. Dercon notes that only some households in a society typically have access to policy interventions and this can incentivise them to opt out of informal collective insurance arrangements, leaving the other

² We use the term 'expected capability' loosely in the way one would use the term 'expected utility'. As with expected utility in a strategic context, an expected capability is one outcome of which is uncertain because it depends on interactions with other people.

households more vulnerable than before. He argues that public policy should therefore either target entire communities or facilitate group-based collective insurance against collective risks. In either case, however, public policy-makers require an understanding of the workings of informal collective insurance in order to safeguard against the strong possibility that policy interventions will harm individual households. More fundamentally, this point draws attention to the way in which a household's vulnerability to poverty and ability to cope with future shocks is not only tied to the possession of assets and self-insurance mechanisms, but may also be tied to individuals' relations of dependence upon others. Understanding household's capability to manage risk therefore requires an understanding of the role of relational capabilities to access collective insurance.

Moreover, relations with others can reduce an individual's capabilities, and not just enable, sustain or insure them. In this regard, Agarwal (2009) distinguishes between *absolute* and *relative* capabilities. She asks us to consider a situation in which a man marries a woman who is better employed than himself. This irks him, and he repeatedly beats her. In doing so, he undermines her health and self-confidence, and reduces her earning abilities and social opportunities. This woman might have greater absolute capabilities than another woman, who is perhaps unemployed or has a very limited income, but the negative relations between her husband and herself results in lower capabilities for her, compared to what she could have.

Note that the recurrent emphasis on the instrumental role of relationships in enabling, reducing, insuring and sustaining capabilities still allows for a conceptual distinction between individual wellbeing and relationships (Sen 1983). In Sen's terms (1999, 119), these analyses tend to view relational properties as being accounted for in the process of converting income or instrumental goods, such as relationships, into an individual capability. A woman with an

insecure husband might struggle to convert good employment into the capability for autonomy, or a farmer with a good friend might draw on his friendship to access the Internet. In both cases, paying close attention to the *conversion* of social relations into capabilities will reveal and explain the variation of capabilities across individuals.

However, recent work on the missing dimensions of poverty has begun to build relationality into wellbeing itself by emphasising the way in which the capability to lead a socially-connected life is valuable for its own sake and is an important missing dimension of wellbeing (Zavaleta et al. 2014; Samuel et al. 2014; Mills et al. 2014). Drawing on Sen, this line of thought views relationship as a form of social connectedness that “relates to the importance of taking part in the life of the community, and ultimately to the Aristotelian understanding that the individual lives an inescapably social life” (Sen 2000, 4). Consequently, “it is not unreasonable for human beings – the social creatures that we are – to value participation in political and social activities without restraint” (Sen 2000, 38).

By articulating relationship as an individual's freedom from restraint to pursue relations with others, the ethical value of relational capabilities inheres in the individual herself, and not so much in her positive interaction with other individuals. Consequently, capabilities theorists define social isolation as “the inadequate quality and quantity of social relations with other people at the different levels where human interaction takes place (individual, group, community and the larger social environment)” (Zavaleta et al. 2014, 5). This definition of isolation can be expressed intuitively as “that experience in which a person feels like they are sitting alone at the bottom of the well – they feel as if no one knows they are suffering; no one cares; if they call out they cannot be heard; they are invisible and outside all circles of concern” (Samuel et al. 2014, 3). This focus on an individual's lack of support from others means that social isolation is

conceived of as a burden, such that the individual feels shame, humiliation and other negative emotions, aside from the way in which this restricts her access to other capabilities (Zavaleta 2007).

Importantly, the focus on the way in which social isolation harms the individual provides an initial way of understanding wellbeing and freedom as a form of *interdependence* with others, though such interdependence is limited to a small subset of capabilities. In addition, the articulation of freedom remains ambiguous, for in some contexts social connectedness is articulated as a form of interdependence with others, and in other contexts, as a form of independence from others. For instance, Sen glosses the relational harms of persistent unemployment in terms of “cynicism about the fairness of social arrangements, and also a perception of dependence on others. These effects are not conducive to responsibility and self-reliance” (Sen 2000, 22).

In contrast, in the rest of this article we advance an unambiguous understanding of capabilities in general as, in part, a form of interdependence with others. We extend the relational critique by arguing that all intuitively valuable capabilities have relational properties, where such relational properties are best understood in terms of relations of care for and identification with others. An *ubuntu* ethic has a richer normative conception of relationship, which extends well beyond an individual's ability to be supported by others or a concern about the harm of isolation as but one dimension of poverty. Since an *ubuntu* ethic locates ethical value fundamentally in the relationship between individuals, and not just individuals themselves, it follows that individual freedom often takes the form of interdependence with others, as the ability to relate to them in appropriate ways.

3. An overview of *ubuntu*

In this section, we spell out one tradition of African thought about ethics, and highlight what we find attractive about it relative to much ethical theory in contemporary Anglo-American thought. It is only in the following section that we indicate how we believe the capabilities approach would benefit from certain insights from this particular African tradition.

By speaking of an “African” tradition, we mean nothing essentialist. We are instead pointing to one strand of thought and practice *salient* on the African continent in ways it tends not to be elsewhere. A theory or perspective counts as African, for us, insofar as it is informed by properties that are *recurrent* in this part of the world. Such a construal allows for the idea that so-called African properties can be found elsewhere beyond the continent. It is also consistent with the fact that there are different intellectual traditions on the continent, amongst which is an *ubuntu* ethic as interpreted here. *Ubuntu* should therefore not be taken as representative of all ethical thought on the continent, nor should it be understood as an unchanging, ahistorical tradition.

One of the more common maxims associated with ethical thought in some African contexts is “I am because we are” or, alternately, “A person is a person through other persons”. One will find such an expression in a wide range of societies, from South Africa (Tutu 1999, 35; Dandala 2009, 260; Mandela 2011, 227), to Kenya (Mbiti 1990, 106, 110, 113) to Nigeria (Menkiti 1984, 171). In unpacking this maxim in the rest of this section, we are not undertaking ethnophilosophy or moral anthropology, that is, we are not merely recounting what are said to be common beliefs within a given society. Similarly, the question of how widely and deeply these beliefs are held within any given society is an interesting and important one; however, it is not a question that we address in this paper. We are instead interested in the *intellectual content* of this common maxim. To this end, we explore theoretical interpretations of it that contemporary

philosophers and related thinkers inspired by African mores have advanced.

In addition, in presenting what we find most theoretically attractive about this strain of African ethical thought, we do not advance everything that many other adherents would deem to be significant about it. For example, we downplay the role of the ancestral realm, which others deem crucial (e.g., Magesa 1997; Ramose 1999), so as to advance a philosophy that also has resonance for societies that do not venerate the ancestral realm. For another example, some believe that their world-views cannot be conveyed to outsiders, either because of structural linguistic differences or because only an insider can appreciate the “know it when I see it” dimension of things African (Mokgoro 1998, 16). We agree that there most likely is a measure of untranslatability, at least in part because ethical views do not only express themselves in propositional form but are also embodied in our attitudes and actions. However, it does not follow from this that nothing useful can be conveyed. Indeed, as the discussion of particularism in the context of the capabilities approach made clear, a commitment to the richness of lived experience and an understanding of the limits of theory is consistent with the acknowledgement that theory and the perspectives of others can guide and deepen our reflections on what it means to live well.

Now, the maxim that a person is a person through other persons sounds like a descriptive or metaphysical claim, and indeed it is, in part. Some of what this sort of phrase expresses is the idea that we cannot survive on our own, that we are vulnerable creatures in need of others to exist and to become who we are (e.g., Dandala 2009, 260). The emphasis on the instrumental role of relations in the capabilities approach is part of this recognition of our need for other people.

However, African philosophers typically treat the maxim as having normative or ethical

dimensions. When it is said that a person is a person, the implicit suggestion is that one ought to become a real person or to develop true personhood (e.g., Ramose 1999, 52-53; deleted for blind review). A common interpretation of this is that personhood comes in degrees, where one's foremost aim in life should be to exhibit it as much as one can (Nkulu-N'Sengha 2009). This ethical view therefore most closely resembles perfectionism in Anglo-American moral philosophy, according to which one should strive to maximise self-realisation or human excellence, where such excellence is capable of continuous development; it is "infinitely perfectible" (Murdoch 1970, 23). One should strive to manifest *ubuntu*, which, recall, is the isiNguni word for humanness or virtue used by many southern Africans. Those who have failed to do so are frequently said "not to be a person" or to be "non-persons" or even to be "animals" (Letseka 2000, 186; Dandala 2009, 260–261; Nkulu-N'Sengha 2009, 144) This way of speaking does not mean that wicked individuals are literally no longer human, no longer the subject of human rights; it means rather that these individuals have failed to exhibit what is valuable about human nature to any significant degree (Gyekye 2010).

What is it that is valuable about human nature? How does one develop into a genuine person? Which behaviours are expressive of *ubuntu*? According to the maxim, one is to live "through other persons", but, again, that phrasing could be more helpful to those outside the fold. According to an extremely influential reading, to develop personhood through other persons means to prize communal relationships with them. As Augustine Shutte remarks in one of the first books devoted to *ubuntu*, "Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded" (2001, 30).

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that "communal" in the present context differs from

communitarianism of the sort often discussed in Anglo-American scholarship. Anglo-American communitarianism has tended to deem norms either to be binding on one because one has been born into a certain society (Sandel 1984) or to be valid because of the meanings shared in a certain culture (Walzer 1983). That is, it has often taken a given group's identity to be normatively basic in some way. And there are admittedly some interpretations of an *ubuntu* ethic according to which groups alone have basic rights, with individual human rights being appropriate only for Western societies (Ake 1987).

However, the theoretical approach to *ubuntu* that we find most attractive maintains that individuals have a dignity that demands respect in the form of prizing certain relationships among individuals, rather than according primacy to the group. Instead of the *relativist* idea that an individual must live up to whichever norms a certain group accepts, the idea is rather the *relational* one that individuals ought to prize each other in virtue of their capacity to commune (Khoza 1994; Christians 2004, 244-245).

Beyond the promise of making good normative sense of human rights, as indicated below, this orientation is more conducive to empirical research than the standard communitarian outlook, which suffers from the difficulty of how to define a community as an empirical unit of analysis (e.g. Mosse 1997). In contrast, the focus on the relationship between individuals is consistent with a weak form of methodological individualism, and therefore promises to be easily operationalised for empirical research through well-developed tools such as social network analysis.

The relevant sort of relationship is one commonly labelled “communal” or one of “harmony” or “fellowship”, as mentioned in quotations below. For this strain of African thought about ethics, one develops personhood specifically insofar as one prizes relationships in which

one exhibits a variety of attitudes and behaviours towards others such as: thinking of oneself as a member of a relationship, as a “we” and not so much as an “I”; taking joy and pride in other people’s accomplishments; feeling a sense of togetherness; taking care not to isolate oneself from others; avoiding the coercion or deception of others (who are innocent); cooperating with them; engaging in certain projects because “this is who we are”; engaging in mutual aid; doing so for the sake of others; judging others to have dignity; imagining what it is like to be in another’s shoes; feeling compassion for others (for a comprehensive list of these conditions and of how they might relate to each other as a system, see deleted for blind review). For just one example from the literature, consider the Kenyan historian of African philosophy, Dismas Masolo, when he highlights the African communal values of “living a life of mutual concern for the welfare of others, such as in a cooperative creation and distribution of wealth. ... Feeling integrated with as well as willing to integrate others into a web of relations free of friction and conflict” (Masolo 2010, 240; see also Mokgoro 1998, 17; Mnyaka and Motlhabi 2005).

Roughly, the more one prizes these kinds of other-regarding tendencies, the more *ubuntu* one exhibits, that is, the more human or excellent one is. Since these dispositions are more or less what English speakers mean by “friendliness” or even “love” in a broad sense, perhaps the reader can begin to appreciate why one might, with much of the African tradition, find relationality to be good for its own sake. As Desmond Tutu has remarked of African moral thought, “Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us [Africans – ed.] the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague” (1999, 34-35). Although friendly or loving relationships can of course be expected to bring desirable things in their wake, they are also plausible candidates for final goods, i.e., things that are good in themselves, apart from what they cause in the long run.

We acknowledge that there are other African philosophers who have maintained that communal relationship (or harmony, friendliness, etc.) is not to be valued for its own sake, but rather as a means to the production of some other value such as utility (Gyekye 1997, 2010) or vitality (Magesa 1997; Bujo 1998). However, even these theorists clearly maintain that communal relationship is, from a characteristically African philosophical standpoint, an *essential* reliable means towards the end of promoting well-being or life, and so would share our view that development theory must systematically focus on relationality.

In sum, this tradition of ethical thought suggests that certain relationships are at the heart of morality and justice, such that wrongdoing is essentially a failure to relate. From this perspective, living badly roughly consists of unfriendliness, or, more carefully, a failure to prize friendliness, or as Peter Kasenene, a scholar of African ethics, remarks, “immorality is the word or deed which undermines fellowship” (1998, 21). What exploitation, theft and racism have in common, by the present approach, is that they are various ways of undermining communal relationship or are instances of its opposite, discord. Or consider human rights violations as consisting of extremely unloving actions, that is, behaviour that prompts psychological distance between people, involves gross subordination rather than coordination, causes great harm instead of producing benefit, and is done consequent to cruel attitudes or those indifferent towards others’ well-being. Such an account is *prima facie* plausible and contrasts sharply with the dominant, Kantian view that human rights violations are severe impairments of individual autonomy (deleted for blind review).

Note that this interpretation of an *ubuntu* ethic cannot be collapsed into a Christian ethic of forgiveness or the Golden Rule. Those who have inflicted harm have a responsibility to make reparations for the harm they have caused and to seek reconciliation with the injured party; in the

absence of such reparations, those who have suffered harm may be justified in compelling the agents of their harm to make amends (deleted for blind review).

Abstract considerations such as these are naturally to be made more concrete and nuanced in a given context, and in the first instance by those who would be affected by a certain interpretation of them. No prominent African thinker seeks to offer an algorithm by which to apply ethical values and principles. Instead, if one's basic ethical aim is to honour certain relationships between people, then it will rarely be enough to treat them strictly in accordance with the logical entailments of a rule. Instead, developing, sustaining and more generally prizing relationships requires close attention to the details of people's histories, self-understandings, aspirations and apprehensions, and also of how they differ from one another and can potentially be made to harmonise, or at least not to conflict so much (deleted for blind review).

In addition, it is unlikely that solitary reflection can produce reliable outcomes about how to resolve disputes and dilemmas. Instead, as with the capabilities approach, the *ubuntu* ethic of the sort we have articulated tends to favour dialogue and public deliberation in order to determine the right way forward. Because relationships are complex, a person cogitating on her own is unlikely to be able to figure out how to improve them. Instead, success on that score is much more probable when many heads are put to the task, especially those of the people who are involved in the issue. In this respect, consultation, discussion and even consensus are often viewed as normatively desirable by political philosophers on the continent. Contemporary African theorists continue to advocate less gendered and paternalistic forms of agreement-seeking as a way to overcome political conflict. One such instance might be the aim of reaching unanimous agreement among parliamentarians as something likely to reveal what would be good for the public as a whole and to both instantiate and foster communal relationship (see, for

instance, Gyekye 1992; Wiredu 1996). Another example could be modelled on the development of South Africa's Freedom Charter in 1955, when 50,000 volunteers reportedly canvassed "freedom demands" from people all across the country; these demands were then debated and consolidated by a delegation of 3,000 people across gender, ethnic and racial categories (Suttner 2006).

This discussion makes clear that the source of normativity or ethical value in an *ubuntu* ethic lies in the relationship between people, rather than just in the individual, for a person's humanness or personhood makes necessary reference to her relations of (roughly) care for and cooperative engagement with others. Consequently, human freedom, as the ability to be governed by one's highest self, is best understood as a way of living with others in a relationship of reciprocal compassion and participation. An *ubuntu* ethic is unambiguous about freedom: it is in large part a form of interdependence with others, a kind of "freedom to" relate in a certain way that is distinct from the negative liberty of "freedom from" the interference of others.

A fair concern about an *ubuntu* ethic is whether it can account for the intuitive values of individuality, uniqueness and the like. Since a friendly relationship is naturally understood as consistent with them, we believe that it can, but that is something to establish elsewhere. In addition, we presume that it is not difficult to generalise an ethic that is in the first instance about an individual's virtue to institutional and social contexts. For example, we presume that it makes sense to treat a state as a kind of agent with certain attitudes and orientations that can be morally better or worse, and, further, that how an individual relates to others in her society can affect her degree of virtue. We acknowledge that these are not obvious points, but ask that the reader consider what development theory, by which we very broadly mean an account of how societies ought to progress, looks like when this approach is adopted. It will turn out different from the

development approaches of, say, Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011).

In sum, our normative conception of relationship inspired by African philosophy recognizes that our need to take care of others, as much as our need to be cared for, is central to living well. By placing individual agency at the heart of wellbeing, it offers a richer conception of relationship than the standard capabilities conception of relationship as an individual's ability to be supported by others. In the next section, we draw on relational ideas that are commonly associated with *ubuntu* in order to articulate a novel approach to development theory. Although the theory would require contextual judgement and public deliberation in order to apply in detail, we nonetheless suggest that there are broad conceptual lessons to be learned from this African intellectual tradition that would be worth guiding future reflection about how to understand and address poverty as capability deprivation.

4. An *ubuntu*-based capabilities approach

In our view, a promising version of the capabilities approach is one that takes on board key features of an *ubuntu* ethic. We favour the idea that capabilities themselves are essentially well understood as consisting of abilities to relate to others in caring and participative ways, where such relationships are good for their own sake or have basic ethical value. In this section, we set out our *ubuntu*-based capabilities approach in two ways. First, we apply it systematically to the case of access to water, and second, we highlight how its implications differ from what influential capabilities theorists have said about relational deprivations. We focus on water since the relational value of natural resources is perhaps less apparent than socially-constructed goods such as education and healthcare. Water is therefore a good test case: if we can make a sensible defence of an *ubuntu* interpretation of access to water, then it is likely that such an interpretation

applies to all capabilities. As such, we treat this as an extended thought experiment that helps us test the limits of *ubuntu* theorising; nevertheless, for those interested, we provide references to empirical work on the topic.

We start by quoting what an African elder told one of us in an interview about why she finds poverty problematic, for we judge it to be a revealing comment on the harm of poverty (deleted for blind review). The interview took place at an *imbizo* organised by the (deleted for blind review) in 2007, where several hundred laypeople were gathered together to discuss what *ubuntu* means to them and how to advance it. This person said that she detests being poor *because she is unable to share with others*. She did not say that she detests being poor because it means she cannot obtain certain functionings for herself apart from others (or because it causes her suffering as per utilitarianism, or because it leaves her with little range of choice à la Kantianism). Instead, she views deprivations as being a state in which one is *unable to give*, viz. unable to exhibit solidarity with others or to take care of them. We find much wisdom in this remark, and use it as a springboard for a broad conception of the relevant capabilities.

What this person's disposition reveals to us is that what appear to be capabilities that make no essential reference to others are often well re-conceptualised as being of value at least partly insofar as they contribute to or constitute relationships. While material resources (such as income) may be valuable because of the way in which they allow an individual to achieve functionings that we have reason to value, an *ubuntu* interpretation would deepen this account of value by awakening us to the way in which material resources can enable or reduce relationships of care.

What goes for income, we submit, readily applies to capabilities regarding access to healthcare, education and housing. These, too, are plausibly viewed as having value in respect of

their ability to promote or constitute communal relationship. Healthcare enables one to take care of others; housing allows one to live with others; education facilitates one's contribution to others' well-being, say, by wisely avoiding conflict or being able to hold a job. In all these cases, ethical value is *also* located in the relations of belonging and caring themselves, and not *just* in their effects on individuals.

However, poverty is not only well-understood as something that negatively affects people's ability to care for others. It is also well understood as often being reflective of a situation in which people's humanity is not prized. An eloquent and moving account of this view can be found in the intellectual writings of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shackdwellers' movement in South Africa:

In our movement we have often said that we are not free because we are forced to live without toilets, electricity, lighting, refuse removal, enough water or proper policing and, therefore, with fires, sickness, violence and rape. We have often said that we are not free because our children are chased out of good schools and because we are being chased out of good areas and therefore away from education, work, clinics, sports fields and libraries. We have often said that we are not free because the politics of the poor is treated like a criminal offence by the Municipalities while real criminals are treated like business partners...

But freedom is more than all of this. Freedom is a way of living not a list of demands to be met. Delivering houses will do away with the lack of houses

but it won't make us free on its own. Freedom is a way of living where everyone is important and where everyone's experience and intelligence counts. (Abahlali baseMjondolo 2009)

On an *ubuntu* ethic, this ethical centrality of relations of care and participation, of treating others with dignity, is at the heart of what it means to live well and in freedom, to express one's humanity to the utmost.

In our view, all capabilities have relational value, although some of them may also have non-relational value. For instance, the ability to access potable water is plausibly valuable not only because it promotes communal relationship, as we discuss below, but also because it is necessary for biological functioning, a consideration that makes no essential reference to anyone but the individual. This view is weaker than the claim that capabilities have only relational value. However, we cannot think of any significant capabilities that do not plausibly have some substantial relational value, and so our view is much stronger than those who would claim that only a small sub-class of capabilities have relational value. We contend that relationality is a salient feature of all ethically important capabilities, and is worthy of consideration in all cases when thinking about development.

4.1. Lack of capability as an obstacle to relation

Suppose that a family does not have access to potable water. In this case, each person will feel the deprivation keenly in terms of her individual comfort and biological wellbeing. However, over and above this, a parent or guardian would plausibly feel a second kind of deprivation, for it is a terrible thing for parents to see their children go thirsty, and to know that they will not be

able to have the experience of a bath or a shower. It is a further burden for parents to sacrifice the income they would have spent on food, clothes, books and toys for their children on having to buy water for them. Should they have to queue for hours at a single tap that services several hundred people, or walk great distances to fetch water from a spring or a river, the cost to their time is a further diversion from their ability to care for their children in other ways, such as playing with them, telling them stories, helping them with their homework and guiding them in their ethical upbringing.³

Conversely, should the family have access to potable water, then it would not only benefit each person's biological functioning. Providing water to one's child is an expression of care for her biological needs, and is part of the process of enabling a child to grow into a caring individual herself. From this perspective, part of the ethical significance of providing water to another is that this would enable her to care for and more generally commune with others.

We use the example of the caring relations between parents and children to bring out the issue more sharply. This is not because we think that all relations of care should approximate the relation between parent and child. However, we recognise that many of us live in societies in which systemic violence and social alienation are deeply normalised, such that we may become desensitised to relations of exploitation and harm. In such circumstances, we hope that familial

³ Access to water is typically, although not always, deeply gendered, where women tend to bear the highest burdens from divestment in public water provision in terms of traveling to get water, paying for water, caring for those suffering from water-borne diseases, and needing water to cook and clean (see, for instance, Zwarteveen 1997; Crow and Sultana 2002; Sorenson, Morssink, and Campos 2011; Koolwal and Van de Walle 2013). These work burdens characteristically reflect in women working longer hours than men, with less time for leisure and socialising (Roy and Crow 2004; Blackden and Wodon 2006). While such work subsidises men's wage labour, it is seldom formally considered in economic models (for critiques of this, see for instance, Agénor, Canuto, and da Silva 2014; Ferrant, Pesando, and Nowacka 2014; Fontana 2014). Empirical work suggests that, in general, divestment in public goods disproportionately impacts women. In this regard, the gendered impacts of structural adjustment are well-documented (see, for instance, AAWORD 1985; Imam 1997; Pereira 2002) .

relations of care serve as an immediate and vivid example of how material deprivations can impede these relations of care in ways that are ethically salient. We think, however, this should illustrate how all relations of care are valuable, regardless of whether they occur in families or outside of them.

What goes for water, we suggest, goes for other standard capabilities. The fact of one's child, or one's relative, or one's neighbour, being sick is bad, but the fact of one being unable to help them is worse (even if not necessarily an occasion for blame). Similarly, a person's lack of education diminishes the range of choices available to him, but his lack of education may also prevent him from helping his children learn at school or make it more difficult for him to find gainful employment so as to take care of his loved ones, situations that are not ethically desirable. These examples suggest that capability deprivation does not merely detract from the quality of life for individuals considered in isolation; it also essentially inhibits the kinds of sharing and participative relationships between individuals that are central to an *ubuntu* ethic. This is true for members of a family, members of a community, and social actors such as the state.

In contrast to our view, capabilities theorists tend to see only a sub-class of capabilities as having relational value and locate the ethical value in the individual rather than in relations between individuals. For instance, Nussbaum provides a list of capabilities that she takes to be central to living well; of these, the capability for affiliation is considered separately from other capabilities, such as the capability for bodily health (Nussbaum 2003). Similarly, those working on relational capabilities that are missing from standard indicators of poverty consider social isolation to be a deprivation that is conceptually distinct from other capabilities (e.g. Zavaleta et al. 2014). In both cases, the focus is on how an individual is harmed by her social isolation.

However, doing so obscures the underlying analytical relation between an individual's attainment of capabilities for herself, and an individual's ability to enter into relationships of identity and solidarity with others.

An *ubuntu* view, on the other hand, places relationship at the centre of the human good, and therefore provides a more intuitive and unified way of understanding the interaction between different capabilities. This is important for systematically investigating the consequences of policy interventions and the way in which relationships of care and other forms of communion mediate and shape these interventions.

4.2. Lack of capability as being the disruption of relation

On an *ubuntu* ethic, all individuals should develop their humanness by communing with others, which in turn means helping them where they can and the cost of doing so is not prohibitive particularly with respect to the relationships they already have established. It follows that organisations and groups, which are composed of individuals, should likewise help others. With the ability to aid comes responsibility, and so the duty to help those who are worse off lies not merely with the state, but with any social actors in a position to do some good without substantially sacrificing communal considerations elsewhere.

Thus, in cases where individuals lack a capability, such as the ability to access water, and social actors, such as the state, could feasibly provide them with this capability and do not, we say that these social actors have failed to take care of those in need. Here, capability deprivation is reflective of a situation in which social actors do not work to foster other's wellbeing, and are not sufficiently motivated by sympathy or the judgement that others' wellbeing matters for its own sake.

In addition to failing to care for others' quality of life, we maintain that these actors would be failing to share a way of life with others. For instance, they would be treating those in need of water as separate and inferior, instead of working to develop a sense of identity with them. The deprivation of this capability is therefore in part a deprivation of the proper, cooperative relationship that should obtain within society. In this sense, the attainment of an individual capability, such as access to water, is also the attainment of another capability, that of social actors such as the state to relate to individuals in a cohesive way.

In contrast to our view, capabilities theorists do not focus on the disruption of these relations as indicative of a lack of social identity and solidarity, or, conversely, on the attainment of relations as an expression of them. For instance, Sen argues that the absence of social safety nets during the East Asian crisis resulted in fresh inequality and destitution for socially excluded individuals, who disproportionately bore the negative impacts of the crisis (Sen 2000, 36). Here, the focus is on the consequences for individuals in themselves. An *ubuntu* interpretation, however, would also focus our attention on the way in which the absence of social safety nets is an expression of lack of identity and solidarity between the state and the most vulnerable in society. Similarly, when Sen points out that widespread land reform in Japan provided basic agricultural resources to the most vulnerable in society and thereby substantially reduced social exclusion, he focuses on the consequences for individuals considered apart from their relations with others (Sen 2000, 34). An *ubuntu* interpretation, however, would also bring our attention to the way in which land reform expressed and facilitated greater togetherness and reciprocity between state and citizen.

Unlike standard accounts of capabilities, this focus on relationship provides us with the language to articulate why the attainment of individual capabilities is simultaneously the

strengthening of the relationship between individuals and social actors such as the state. Consequently, it provides a simple and direct way of distinguishing between the *inability* of social actors such as the state to enable individual capabilities, and their *reluctance* to do so. While capability deprivation in the former situation is bad, capability deprivation in the latter situation is morally much worse, an injustice, and helps explain how this might weaken the state's legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

4.3. Skewed distribution weakening a capability

The skewed distribution of resources leading to the uneven fulfilment of capabilities within society may be reflective of two kinds of failure of relationship: actively dispossessing others of resources or passively benefiting from the way in which social actors dispossess others. If one person has access to water at the expense of another, by depriving her of access or benefiting from her deprivation, then by our *ubuntu*-based approach we can say she does not truly have this capability in its full sense. The capability is itself marred by the unfriendly or discordant way in which it is attained and sustained.

The active dispossession of others is often carried out by institutional actors such as the state or private companies. Examples include forcibly removing communities so as to access lucrative land⁴ and polluting groundwater systems so as to decrease the costs of industrial activities. Should an individual improve her capabilities to access water, for instance, by actively participating in theft, then an *ubuntu*-based view of capabilities would deny her the full attainment of them, since it has been achieved through an act of unfriendliness towards others. Conversely, in understanding the true nature of capabilities deprivation through dispossession,

⁴ For a first-hand account of forced removals, see Abahlali baseMjondolo (2009).

one is compelled to pay close attention to the causal relations that brought about the deprivation.

The class of individuals who actively dispossess others, however, is likely to be smaller than those who passively benefit from such dispossession. For instance, today many large white-owned agricultural enterprises in South Africa benefit from a plentiful supply of water as a consequence of the way in which infrastructural sources and water were diverted away from former African “homelands” by the apartheid state.⁵ Although these individuals may have the capability to access a plentiful and cheap supply of water, in passively benefiting from the dispossession of others, their capability is marred, or imperfectly realised, for it cannot be said that they are living well, where living well means prizing communion. We can extend the example further. For many African households that do not have access to piped water as a consequence of deliberate exclusion from water under apartheid, women often disproportionately bear the burden of fetching water from streams, springs and communal taps (Tsheola 2012). In such cases, while all family members have access to water as a consequence of this, the disproportionate burden on women implies that the capability is significantly marred.

The focus on relationship provides us with the language to distinguish different forms of inequality from one another. Suppose there is an island where one half has more capabilities in virtue of a random distribution of resources that favours their side, and that they are utterly cut off from the other side of the island. This differs from the situation we have just described, in which some people dispossess others and thereby improve their capabilities. While inequality in the first situation is bad, inequality in the second situation is worse, in the sense of being unjust, since it is reflective of a failure of human relationship.

This means that, in situations characterised by inequality arising out of unfriendly

⁵ Governance of water in South Africa is complex and shaped by economic geographies that are contoured by race, class, gender and citizenship (Chikhozo 2006; Movik 2014; Clifford-Holmes et al. 2016; Munro et al. 2016)

relationships, it is insufficient to focus solely on those who are deprived of capabilities. One must also attend to those who have attained capabilities. An *ubuntu* focus then allows us to distinguish between those who have attained capabilities through friendly relationships, and those who have attained capabilities at the expense of others.

In practice, this implies that data for the empirical measurement of capabilities should ideally be gathered together with information on standard categories of dispossession such as race, class, gender, caste, religion, ethnicity and citizenship where historically relevant. Capability deprivation and attainment can then be disaggregated by these categories of dispossession. If members of a privileged social category consistently attain capabilities while members of disadvantaged social categories consistently exhibit deprivations, one could plausibly take this as a warning sign that unfriendly or discordant relations are widespread and persistent, and attenuate the measurement of capability attainment for privileged individuals accordingly, for they cannot be said to be living well *qua* honouring communion.

This approach differs from existing ones to capability deprivation in a number of interesting ways. First, the capabilities approach tends to focus on multidimensional poverty as capabilities deprivation in terms that are conceptually distinct from capabilities attainment. Second, the capabilities approach does not distinguish between capabilities that are attained through friendly relations and those that are attained through unfriendly relations. As a consequence of this, considerations of inequality are applied *after* the measurement of wellbeing. For instance, in their proposal for the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index, the capabilities theorists Sabina Alkire and James Foster (2010) present a way of adjusting or attenuating each dimension's average value according to its level of inequality. Here, inequality is measured across the dimensions of health, education or income, rather than across social

categories of dispossession. While an aggregate picture of inequality across society is undoubtedly useful, the picture does not distinguish between inequality arising out of discordant or anti-social relationships, and inequality arising out of other circumstances, such as the concentration of economic hubs, natural resources or infrastructure in different parts of a country. Accordingly, it is difficult to identify the way in which various categories of dispossession may result in different forms of inequality. For instance, general wealth inequality in the United States has increased since the severe recession in 2007, and by 2014 the median wealth of upper-income families was seven times the median wealth of middle-income families (Fry and Kochhar 2014). In contrast, wealth inequality between races is significantly higher: in 2014 the median wealth of white households was thirteen times the median wealth of black households (Kochhar and Fry 2014). However, since African Americans are a minority, an inequality-adjusted HDI would not be sufficiently sensitive to this substantial failure of relationship.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to find a point of agreement between the capabilities approach and an *ubuntu* ethic. To do so, we tried to show that an *ubuntu* reading of the capabilities approach not only provides a theoretical grounding for existing work on relational capabilities, but also shows how deeply relational all intuitively important capabilities are. This expands the focus of the capabilities approach to consider the relations between individuals as the locus of ethical value. In doing so, we argued, an *ubuntu* approach reveals new ways of understanding the ethical significance of standard capabilities, and provides an intuitive and unified theoretical framework for interpreting and investigating the relational properties of capabilities.

On our account, this *ubuntu* approach conceptualises capabilities as having intrinsically relational properties in three respects. First, capabilities deprivation can constrain an individual's ability to care for others. While this person may have deep and caring relations with others, these relations could be more perfectly realized, we argued, if she was not forced into survivalist mode by her material deprivation. Second, capabilities deprivation may be an outcome of lack of care on the part of social actors, such as the state. There is, we argued, a significant ethical difference between a state that is unable to enable individuals' capabilities, and a state that is reluctant to do so. Third, an individual who attains a capability through the deprivation of others does not have this capability in full, since it is marred by the ill-treatment of others. Again, there is a significant ethical difference between the person who attains capabilities by benefiting from the ill-treatment of others and the person who does not. The *badness* of these situations, we contended, cannot be explained simply by pointing to material deprivation; instead, it also requires an understanding of the ethical centrality of relations of care, friendship and solidarity.

This account therefore modifies the informational focus of the capabilities approach in the following way. Wellbeing is best understood by focusing on individuals' capabilities, where a capability reflects opportunities to achieve functionings we have reason to value; these *capabilities have intrinsic relational properties – they are opportunities to enter into relations of care with others, and they are an outcome of relations of care with others.*

Capabilities theorists often formulate development as the process of expanding an individual's freedom to accomplish more and better functionings. However, we argued, their interpretation of development as freedom is ambiguous: sometimes it consists in independence from others, and at other times it consists in interdependence with others. An *ubuntu* interpretation of development as freedom is more consistent: if development is a process of

expanding an individual's freedoms to accomplish functionings, this freedom is a form of interdependence with others, where this enables her to express and receive care and thereby exercise her dignity.

This view has two implications for empirical research on poverty. First, investigating capabilities deprivation requires one to pay attention to the ways in which such deprivations shape relations of care and solidarity, and the extent to which these deprivations are an outcome of exploitative or callous relations with social actors, such as the state. Second, a meaningful investigation into capabilities deprivation requires a concomitant analysis of those who have attained capabilities, and the ways in which they have done so. This calls for us to attend to the relations between those who are deprived of capabilities, and those who have attained them – between those who are poor and those who are rich. We argue that such a relational analysis is an intrinsic part of conceptualising and measuring wellbeing, and should therefore not be applied separately from, or as an afterthought to, the measurement of human development. This approach is already implicitly evident in some of the empirical literature we discussed on risk and vulnerability. However, we believe empirical work would benefit from the more systematic and explicit theoretical framework advanced in this paper. In subsequent work we aim to explore this in greater detail.

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